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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2006

In Today's Papers

Turkey Makes Surprise Cyprus Proposal

All papers report Ankara told the Finnish EU presidency it would open one port and one airport provisionally for a year to traffic from Cyprus in exchange of the opening of Gazimagusa (Famagusta) port and the Ercan Airport in northern Cyprus. Papers regard the Turkish offer as a "surprise" move to avert a partial suspension of its EU membership talks. Sabah regards the Turkish offer as a "golden goal" scored one week prior to the summit of EU leaders. Dailies also note that the proposal was welcomed by Turkish markets, making the Turkish lira grow stronger against the dollar, and the stock exchange index rise.

Greek Cypriot Foreign Minister George Lillikas downplayed the proposal, saying "It's a premeditated attempt to impress, and it's a mockery of the EU. It is devoid of any serious content." The Greek Cypriot government said it would never consent to opening Ercan airport to flights other than to Turkey. On Friday, international wires report Lillikas told state radio "Nicosia will revert to a harder line if some in the EU attempt to use the Turkish offer to restrict the sanctions which should be imposed on Turkey for non-compliance."

The European Commission, however, said the last-minute Turkish offer appeared to be an "important move" and that the commission was seeking further clarification and information on the issue. EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn said on Finnish television, "If Turkey's suggestion of opening one port has been made unconditionally, it is a very important step toward Turkey implementing the Ankara Protocol to the customs union," adding it should be discussed at the EU foreign ministers' meeting on December 11. Britain applauded Ankara's initiative as "really significant," with a British official stressing "It is essential that the EU responds." Austrian Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik renewed her call for a freeze of accession negotiations with Ankara until 2008.

The main opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal said this was a "wrong step" since it would amount to recognition of the Greek Cypriot administration. Baykal said the government was trying to make concessions before the forthcoming EU meetings. "We are not informed about the bargaining because this decision was not discussed at the parliament," Baykal said. Hurriyet reports the Turkish General Staff (TGS) Chief General Yasar Buyukanit alluded to the fact that the government had not asked the military's opinion about the offer. "If we had been asked, we would have said the plan was a deviation from the official state policy. This sudden move has not been right," Buyukanit said, adding the problem should be resolved on the UN platform.

Speaking to reporters after meeting Dutch Foreign Minister Bernard Bot in his one-day working visit to the Netherlands, Turkish Cyprus leader Mehmet Ali Talat qualified the Turkish proposal as a "new and positive step."

Iraq Study Group Report Describes Turkey as 'Sunni Muslim Country' Hurriyet and Cumhuriyet report that 'The Iraq Study Group' (ISG) report, defining Turkey as a 'major Sunni Muslim country', implies that the US Administration is leaning towards a Sunni block in the Middle East against the Shiite block. Although, it was stressed in the report that the violence in Iraq could not be stopped only by the military measures, the US Administration was not asked to end its policies in Iraq which supported religious and ethnic separatism. Kirkuk is listed as a major trouble spot in the report, which highlights that a referendum to determine Kirkuk's future before the end of 2007 is a risk factor for the spread of violence in the region.

Haluk Sahin commented in the liberal-intellectual Radikal: "While

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the ISG report is being debated, the Iraq issue seems like the bad ending to a cowboy movie. Americans are not used to facing defeat, but this time the defeat is very obvious. After all the human losses and trillions of dollars spent, the US faces a lost war and internationally weakened prestige. As for the ISG report, it repeats the facts about Iraq which anyone sensible can see. The situation in Iraq is critical and moves toward colossal chaos. There is no magic formula for the Iraq problem and the best thing is to pull out gradually and train the Iraqi forces at the same time. Dialogue with Iran and Syria is the most debated issue in this report but prominent figures of realpolitik, such as Henry Kissinger say, why not. The situation for President Bush is exactly as an American idiom goes, to be caught between a rock (Iraq) and a hard place. He is trapped right there, and has no idea how to find a way out."

Sami Kohen noted in the mainstream Milliyet: "The 142-page report used strong words to depict the situation in Iraq - words like 'grave,' 'terrible' and 'horrifying.' The report is a statement of defeat in Iraq for the US but also provides recommendations under 79 titles even though it admits the difficulty in adopting them. In fact the main difficulty is President Bush himself. The report makes the right analysis and provides the right approach, but the question is whether or not President Bush will be able to accept reality and act accordingly. The Baker-Hamilton report is the right thing to consider. If the administration sets this report aside and does not take it into account, the situation will be even more 'grave,' more 'terrible' and much more 'horrifying.'"

PM Erdogan's Middle East Diplomacy

Radikal reports that Turkey's efforts to mediate between Damascus and Beirut, started giving fruitful results. Yesterday, PM Erdogan briefed Lebanese PM Fuad Siniora over the phone, about his trip to Damascus and his meeting with Syria's Assad. Siniora, after being briefed by Erdogan, decided to send a representative of his country to Turkey within 48 hours. Meanwhile, Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak, NTV and others quote Department Spokesman Sean McCormack as saying in response to a question on PM Erdogan's visits to Iran and Syria that the visits are "normal for neighboring countries" and that the "US appreciates Turkey's efforts for peace and stability in the region."

US House Blocks Eximbank Funds for Railroad Project

Yeni Safak reports US House of Representatives blocked the US Eximbank from providing funds for a railroad project which would connect Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. New York Rep. Joseph Crowley (D) a supporter of the Armenian lobby in the US, stressed that the 258km-long railroad will not be supported because it by-passed Armenia. Yeni Safak says it was no surprise that pro-Armenian resolutions were seen following the Democratic takeover of US Congress.

Sezer Vetoes "Cargill Bill"

Vatan and Cumhuriyet report President Sezer has vetoed a bill on land protection which was criticized as "covert amnesty" for the US food giant Cargill facilities operating in the Bursa province. Sezer justified his veto by saying the bill would be a violation of the equity principle by aiming at resolving problems of one or several foreign companies' industrial facilities established on farming land.

TV Highlights

NTV (6 a.m.)

Domestic News

- On Thursday night, skirmishes broke out between Turkish riot police and a group of supporters of the leftist terrorist DHKP-C, most of whom were wearing masks, in various districts in Istanbul. Around 100 supporters of the organization set fire to two cars, set

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a fire in Gazi neighborhood, closed the street to traffic, and chanted slogans.

- Istanbul prosecutor demands up to three-year prison sentences for 25 demonstrators who prayed in Hagia Sophia museum to protest the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Turkey late last month.

- President Sezer has vetoed the appointment of Prime Ministry Deputy Undersecretary Ruhi Ozbilgic as general director of the state-owned TRT television.

- A Turkish military Black Hawk helicopter crashed in the eastern province of Bingol when a remote controlled bomb was set off while it was landing, killing one military technician on board and five other soldiers.

International News

- White House Spokesman Tony Snow said the US will have no talks with Iran unless Tehran suspends enrichment activities.

- The US Senate voted Wednesday to confirm Robert Gates as the 22nd Secretary of Defense.

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